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IAC-D-57/49

20 September 1956

Post-Mortem on NIE 11-4-56:

Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of

Action Through 1961,

dated 2 August 1956

1. This estimate was approved by the IAC on 2 August 1956 after a more than usually prolonged period of coordination which began on 7 May 1956. The issues which were most difficult to resolve and occasioned the most delay were in the military field. They included: current Soviet strength in heavy bombers; the future strength of the Long-Range Air Force; the personnel strength of Soviet forces; and the likely distribution within them of estimated reductions; Soviet strategic concepts for the conduct of general war. Political and economic issues produced less fundamental divergences of views, although the shifts in Soviet internal and external policy over the last year occasioned some differences.

I. Findings

2. General. While long-standing deficiencies of intelligence on the USSR remain, there have been some gains as the result of a greater openness on the part of the Soviet leaders as well as the more extensive contacts in many fields which their current policy permits. On the whole, estimates of current Soviet strengths, capabilities, and programs as well as the intentions of the USSR over the short term are probably more soundly based than formerly. However, longer-range predictions of Soviet military developments or of Soviet intentions continue to be seriously handicapped by lack of direct evidence and lack of knowledge of the weight given various considerations by the Soviet leaders in their choice of alternative courses of action.

3. Political intelligence. The post-Stalin reforms and the greater accessibility of Soviet personalities at all levels have given us a better picture of the forces at work in Soviet society. Gaps remain with respect to the roles of top Soviet leaders and possible

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policy differences among them, and with respect to the influence of the Party, military, managerial, and other professional elites. These gaps probably cannot be filled short of the acquisition of much more interior knowledge of the regime than we seem likely to get. However, full exploitation of information gained through the broadening contacts currently taking place is indicated.

4. The problems of long-run social and political change in the USSR exceed, in the strict sense, the limits of the five-year estimate. Nevertheless, judgments concerning Soviet developments over a longer period do in fact influence the current attitudes of policy-makers in the Western countries. Answers to questions in this field result more properly from the research of social analysts than from intelligence evidence, but studies of this sort should be followed and perhaps stimulated by the intelligence community.

5. Estimates of Soviet intentions in external policy depend largely on deductions from the general Soviet posture. Since this seems relatively stable at present, predictions are probably fairly sound, at least for periods of a year or two. But particular maneuvers of Soviet policy cannot be anticipated without greater inside knowledge of Soviet plans, and perhaps not even then because of the opportunistic character of many Soviet actions. At present, in the field of competitive trade and aid, more intensive collection effort in countries which are potential recipients might bring useful returns.

6. Economic intelligence. The post-mortem of NIE 11-3-55 identified the costing of the Soviet military effort as the major weakness in economic intelligence on the USSR. The findings of the IAC Ad Hoc Military Cost Study Committee incorporated in NIE 11-4-56 represent a substantial advance in this field but still leave much to be desired in terms of definitiveness and an appreciation of margins of error involved. Intelligence effort in this field can fruitfully be concentrated upon revision of physical estimates of manpower and procurement, the deficiencies of which were noted in the estimate itself; upon increased price collection and the improvement of indirect pricing techniques; and upon investigation of particular segments of the Soviet defense effort such as research and development and atomic energy, the cost of which must now be estimated in the aggregate. All these

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efforts should be carried forward in conjunction with analysis of trends in the announced Soviet defense budget and should contain the documentation necessary for the establishment of error margins. Building upon the work done to date, such collection and research should considerably improve our knowledge of the magnitude of the past and future defense burden and permit better estimates of its likely impact upon economic growth.

7. Military intelligence. Despite the greater knowledge which has become available in some other fields, intelligence on Soviet military plans and programs has profited little from the slight easing of Soviet security restrictions. Work on NIE 11-4-56 emphasized the necessity for: (a) improved collection of information on the strength of Soviet forces and continuing re-evaluation of trends in these strengths; (b) better intelligence on particular weapons programs, especially nuclear weapons, missiles, and aircraft; and (c) more knowledge of Soviet strategic concepts which determine the requirements set by the Soviet leaders for the development of weapons systems and for the future strength and composition of their armed forces.

II. Action

8. The IAC agencies are requested to:

a. Take appropriate action where possible on the intelligence deficiencies and needs described above;

b. Increase efforts to collect information on which an improved study of the costs of the Soviet defense effort could be based. Meanwhile, continue study of this subject with all data available, in order to obtain a coordinated appraisal in time to be contributed to the 1957 estimate. (See paragraph 6 above.)

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